



Undergraduate Research Symposium **May 17, 2019** Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

POSTER SESSION 3

Commons West, Easel 18

2:30 PM to 4:00 PM

Nurturing Emotional Well-Being: The Effects of Mindfulness on New Moms and their Babies'

Socioemotional Development

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Becoming a mother can be an incredibly beautiful process, but it can also become overwhelming and extremely stressful, especially when lacking support and resources. The chronic and significant stress that low-income, pregnant women experience put them at greater risk for adverse health outcomes and their infant at risk for poor developmental outcomes. At the University of Washington's Center for Child and Family Well-Being, our research team has developed mindfulness-based interventions to help new moms adjust to their new life. Our goal is to examine the effects of stress on the mother-infant dyad and to evaluate whether these programs are beneficial for moms and their babies. Expecting mothers are randomly assigned to attend one mindfulness-based program that focuses on preparing for childbirth, reducing postpartum stress, or developing parenting skills. Administration of extensive questionnaires to the mother and recordings of the mother and baby completing various tasks, before and after the program, measure the pair's socioemotional development. We also collect cortisol, a stress hormone, and measure heart rate and breathing during a stress-reactivity paradigm to inform us of the physiological effects of stress. We hypothesize that mothers who exhibit high levels of mindfulness are more likely to engage in consistent, warm, and responsive parenting skills. As a result, these mothers' infants will display better self-regulation and focus. We also predict that mothers and babies who participate in these mindfulness interventions are more likely to show a decrease in cortisol production and have controlled cardiovascular reactivity. Recommendations for future research include establishing a systematic way of identifying mothers at risk so that we may prevent further harms caused by stress. Implications of the findings can be

used to advocate for equitable, accessible mental health programs and implementation of public health policy centered around protecting and empowering vulnerable women and children in our community.